



Whitehorse's *Untitled*, a 1985 oil on canvas, captures a seemingly prosaic scene of a pair of whitetail deer, a buck and doe, captured in a wintry Wisconsin landscape, the scene's long shadows indicating either the start or end of the animals' day. A closer look reveals the artist's use of Pointillism, the French Impressionistic technique of painting with distinct color dots, to bring the sun-soaked image to life. Viewers may have failed to notice this, instead becoming transfixed by the buck's direct stare at viewers who have interrupted his respite.

Culturally based works were among the exhibition's most compelling. Levi and Verna Blackdeer's 2016 *Smoked Art Ensemble*, for example, consisted of a purse and wall hanging made from deerskin that had been braintanned, a time-consuming application of an emulsified solution of animal brain matter and water. Oils from the brain create a hide much more supple and absorbent, which is then smoked to create reverse images from stencils affixed to the hide prior to smoking.

A pair of bracelets made from natural materials, including a porcupine quill weave by Sainz, followed Indigenous techniques. Josephine Lee's *Untitled* (2019) work is an attractive red and tan bracelet woven from black ash. Sainz's black, blue, and tan bracelet, which also uses the braintanned deerskin methodology with natural and dyed quills edged in tiny Czech glass beads, takes a little more complicated approach.

"Porcupine quills are made out of keratin, like our fingernails, and are pliable, almost like spaghetti noodles when they are wet," Sainz says. "I called

the piece *Rain Cloud* because I was inspired by weather extremes. Mother Earth is trying to heal herself from all our damage. I tried to make a statement through the materials and design aesthetic."

Other pieces also mixed old and new elements. Rita Kingswan's *Love Sustained Beaded Ensemble* (2019) features beautifully crafted hair ties and draping earrings in bright colors. The designs appear ancient even if the materials, including Czech glass beads, are not. Simone Brown's *Homp Hamani* (2017), silk appliqué follows a similar ethos, offering a beautifully crafted wall hanging highlighted with Indigenous Great Lakes designs.

On the more experimental side, Henry Payer's 2018 *Oil. Water. Land. Spirit.* uses motor oil, oil paint, oil pastel, and spray paint on canvas to create an earth-toned abstract with bright lines vertically framing faint images of Underwater Panther over horizontal lines that repeat the word *land* more than two dozen times.

Sainz is quick to point out that despite the range of materials and media and the variety of color and styles, *Ho-Chunk Art: Sharing our Sacred Voice through our Art* represents art as distinct as a thumbprint in visually defining the nature of the Ho-Chunk people.

Among the 573 federally recognized tribes and other Indigenous groups in the United States, each has its own visual style, Sainz says. "Each nation has its own set of design aesthetics that show exactly who we are, where we live, and our tribal affiliation." —Michael Muckian

NEW YORK

Alan Michelson: *Wolf Nation*

Whitney Museum
of American Art

ALAN MICHELSON: *WOLF NATION* is a compact yet impactful exhibition that encapsulates Alan Michelson's (Mohawk) experimental, artistic practice. The Whitney Museum of American Art has recently increased its representation of Indigenous artists and perspectives, exemplified by the 2018 exhibition, *Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art*, curated by Marcela Guerrero, and the inclusion of artists Nick Galanin (Tlingit/Unanga), Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Choctaw/Cherokee), Laura Ortman (White Mountain Apache), and Jackson Polys (Tlingit) in the 2019 Whitney Biennial. Michelson's exhibition will hopefully be followed by more solo exhibitions of Native American artists with diverse practices in contemporary American art.

Organized by curator Chrissie Iles and senior curatorial assistant Clémence White, the four works that comprise *Alan Michelson: Wolf Nation* are evocative of Michelson's oeuvre, emphasizing the natural world and history through sound and moving images. Michelson collaborated with Steven Fragale, who assisted in the creation of two augmented reality (AR) installations. Laura Ortman deftly composed the soundtracks. The art's constructed beauty and the responsiveness of Michelson's AR pieces to the Whitney as site make the exhibition largely successful, though his work would have benefited from more space in the museum.



ABOVE Alan Michelson with Steven Fragale, *Town Destroyer*, 2019, wallpaper and augmented reality, with video, color, sound, 5:57 min. Soundtrack by members of Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. Collection of the artist.

The first AR installation, *Sapponckanikan (Tobacco Field)* (2019), was created specifically for the lobby, a virtual tobacco field that sprouts from sleek, grey floors. With the Fragale app, visitors can imagine the space as a Lenape tobacco field planted with a sacred strain of the herb—as it was believed to have once been. A nearby iPad allows viewers without a smart device to experience the piece. *Sapponckanikan* overtakes the lobby with wide, verdant, curved-leaf plants; visitors are subsumed into the tobacco field, which will “grow” during the exhibition’s run. *Sapponckanikan* thus provides a window into the past when the indigeneity of the land was undeniable.

Most of the exhibition occupies a side gallery on Floor 5. *Town Destroyer* (2019), an AR and wallpaper piece by Michelson with Fragale, dominates the entrance to the exhibition. Its long, horizontal format recalls Michelson’s public installations and panoramic works, such as *Mespat* (2001). *Town Destroyer* is a translation of Hanödaga:yas, the Haudenosaunee nickname for George Washington, remembered for his role in eradicating over 60 Iroquois confederacy towns as part of the 1779 Sullivan Expedition. The backdrop for *Town Destroyer* is a simplified, digitally printed interior wall of George Washington’s Mount Vernon plantation estate in Alexandria, Virginia, with two ornate, golden mirrors reflecting candelabras,

blue brocade curtains, and a hint of a wooden door. The mirrors allude to the portal-like quality of the piece. Using the Fragale app, the bust of George Washington juts out from the wall and becomes a platform for images related to the expedition, including maps of the towns, the marker in New York for the site of the town’s destruction, and Mount Vernon. The soundtrack is the repeated name, Hanödaga:yas, spoken by members of the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Michelson’s reserve in Canada. The artist’s adroit research skills are apparent in his choice of images and maps. He uses Washington’s image to problematize his legacy as the first of many Americans presidents to displace America’s Indigenous peoples.

In the gallery, a small screen on the wall behind this installation allows viewers without a smart device to view the AR component. The screen replicates the AR app experience, but a larger one would have made for a more compelling experience of the piece. At any scale, *Town Destroyer* is mesmerizing and, like *Sapponckanikan*, it demonstrates the deftness with which Michelson uses new media to explore Indigenous perspectives on history.

The long hallway where *Town Destroyer* is on view leads to the main exhibition text of the show, the titular piece of the exhibition, *Wolf Nation* (2018), and the high-definition video, *Shattemuc*.

Wolf Nation was first installed in the Storm King Art Center in Cornwall, New York, the traditional land of the Munsee, the Wolf clan of the Lenape people. *Wolf Nation* has an otherworldly aesthetic and honors Munsee people through their animal, the now near-extinct red wolf. In a darkened projection gallery, *Wolf Nation* spellbinds viewers with its ethereal purple color and soundtrack composed entirely of wolf howls by Laura Ortman. Purple evokes the wampum belt, a powerful Haudenosaunee object notably gifted to George Washington. Michelson made the video using intentionally ordinary webcam footage from a wolf rescue center in New York, transforming it into an entrancing, sensorial piece. As one watches, the juxtaposition of the howling and the calm animals becomes unsettling. The wolves move about as the camera remains still below them. Their consuming presence acts as a metaphor for the displacement of the Munsee, who, like the wolves, once oversaw a markedly different environment.

In a shorter hallway between *Wolf Nation* and *Town Destroyer*, *Shattemuc* (2009) takes viewers along the path of sea captain Henry Hudson’s 1609 expedition, particularly the shores on which he had violent skirmishes with the local Rumachenancks. The 30-minute video begins silently, then Ortman’s melodic guitar riff gradually accompanies the journey. The footage was shot on a vintage police boat lit by a single headlight surveying Rumachenanck land near pristine nature and brightly lit industrial areas. Through the title, *Shattemuc*, a native name of the Hudson River, Michelson underscores the indigeneity of a place with a well-known colonial legacy. *Shattemuc* displays Michelson’s tendency toward panoramic imagery paired with music. In its most entrancing moments, objects appear slowly out of darkness, such as the floating buoy tower visible at first from its numbers at the exact moment that the music begins. The slight wave of the camera as the boat turns and catches its own wake echoes this moment of quiet beauty.

Shattemuc’s ethereal quality is slightly diminished by the competing howls of *Wolf Nation* and by external light from a nearby doorway. In a darker space, the intricacy of the footage’s

varying levels of light would have more impact. Despite the many familiar trappings of an American industrial coast, *Shattemuc* transforms the coast at night into an ominous atmosphere. Viewers are potentially made to feel as Indigenous peoples have: unsettled, suddenly shaken from their understandings and worldview by an initially unknown terror.

Alan Michelson: Wolf Nation showcases the artist's ability to conceptualize new site-specific responses to American history, using augmented reality to indigenize the digital space of AR and physical spaces of the museum. With appealing aesthetics, *Wolf Nation* invites viewers to consider Indigenous perspectives on lesser known histories, a conceptually ferocious move.

—Marina Tyquingco (Chamorro)

NORMAN, OKLAHOMA

Misunderstood! Indigenous Art and Poetry as Political Resistance

Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art,
University of Oklahoma

ON VIEW from October 4 through December 29, 2019, *Misunderstood!* offered audiences a chance to consider the relationships between the written word and the visual arts. In doing so, this exhibition resonates beyond the gallery as deeper meanings emerge from the connections between both art forms. Curated by Anna Smist (Sac & Fox/Seminole), *Misunderstood!* features a group of poems reproduced as larger-than-life vinyl installations interspersed with works from the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art's permanent collection. The effect creates lively, rhythmic movement between each artistic expression, and the gallery gives voice to a chorus of artists speaking pointedly about the urgencies of accurate representation of Native American and First Nations peoples.

Through an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation internship at the museum, Smist, an undergraduate literature student

at Yale University, returned home to Oklahoma for three months this past summer to work on this curatorial project. The exhibition began at a much smaller scale, and, upon the museum staff's closer consideration of the themes conveyed, Smist met their request to increase her checklist twofold for the project to hold a larger presence. Smist's concept grew from the poem, *Misunderstood!* (ca. 1970s), by Kiowa/Caddo artist T. C. Cannon (1946–1978), who served in the Vietnam War. The artist's sister, Joyce Cannon Yi (Kiowa/Caddo) granted permission for her brother's writings to be included and gave her nod to the exhibition's significance.¹ A November poetry reading lent local community voices to the exhibition gallery through compelling performances of ten of the featured poems.

While there is a formal entrance into the *Misunderstood!* gallery at the top of the stairwell to the mezzanine level, visitors also have the opportunity to enter the exhibition space from the elevator at the opposite end of the floor. The two access points allow for audiences to experience the artworks and the poems through multiple pathways. New dialogues between the visual and the verbal come

into view, and one may find themselves quickly whisked into the critical stories being told. I entered the gallery from the elevator and found that the large, diagonal wall near this end activated the space, working as a layer to cross through and move toward the core of the exhibition. Upon reaching the center room, Oglala Lakota writer Layli Long Soldier's poem, *Three* (2017), punctuated the area with its square-shaped installation and words that confronted the pressures put on Native American peoples to fit within a boxed-in identity. Not far from a poem by Joy Harjo (Muscogee/Cherokee), the 2019 United States Poet Laureate, Long Soldier's words excitedly evoke the crux of Smist's exhibition concept.

The gallery features more than 40 artworks made in the 20th and 21st centuries and places some emphasis on Oklahoma-based tribes by including paintings by the Kiowa Six and Diane O'Leary (Comanche, 1938–2013) and drawings by Phyllis Fife (Muscogee) and T. C. Cannon. Works on paper make up the majority of the art on view, with two sculptures and two cases of civil rights-era ephemera further diversifying the space. The exhibition's logo is adapted from



ABOVE Diane O'Leary, PhD (Comanche, 1939–2013), *Epitaph*, n.d., acrylic, 39¾ × 47¾ in., collection of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; The James T. Bialac Native American Art Collection, 2010. Image courtesy of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

1. Anna Smist in discussion with the author, November 16, 2019.